U.S. Set to Expand Naval Base in Papua New Guinea

BY ZACH ABDI
APRIL 6, 2024 9:13 PM

Builder 3rd Class Nicolas Buccafuri, Construction Electrician Constructionman Robert Neely, and Construction Electrician 3rd Class Nicolas Bartholomew, hang a battalion evaluation equipment program sign for Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 5 at Lombrum Naval Base, Papua New Guinea in 2021. US Navy Photo

In an effort to push back China's influence and expand its presence in Oceania, the U.S. is renovating Lombrum Naval Base on the Island of Los Negros in Papua New Guinea.

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The U.S. recently announced that the U.S. Navy is looking at three projects for Lombrum: a 7,556-square-foot Regional Maritime Training Center; a 7,351-square-foot small Boat Team and Boson Facility; and overhauling a 118-foot-long deteriorated small boat jetty. The combined expected price tag for these projects ranges from $11 million to $25 million.

“These…projects will support the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force), maritime security operations, U.S. military personnel participating in joint exercises, and USINDOPACOM Theater Campaign Plan with various critical facilities located at Lombrum Naval Base.” reads the announcement.

The U.S. announced plans to redevelop Lombrum naval base in 2018, when former Vice President Mike Pence, announced that the U.S. would partner with both Australia and Papua New Guinea on the initiative.

The Trump administration saw the move as a response to Chinese infrastructure projects. However, the U.S. did not allocate any funds towards the redevelopment effort.

Currently, Lombrum naval base is one of six facilities on Papua New Guinea to which U.S. personnel have an unimpeded access under the Defense Cooperation Agreement signed between Washington and Port Moresby in 2023.

Under the defense pact, the U.S. is allowed to use three airports, two ports and one naval base for training, transit and pre-position equipment, supplies and materiel. However, the agreement does not allow the U.S. to station forces in Papua New Guinea permanently.

The naval base, which is currently home to four Guardian-class Patrol Boats, began a $150 million

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multi-year redevelopment funded by Australia in 2020. It is scheduled to conclude in September of 2024.

USNI News Graphic

The 2020 redevelopment includes a new electricity generation facility, new training and living accommodations, and repairing facilities for the Guardian-class Patrol Boats. The newly announced projects will add on-site patrol boat maintenance facilities.

The existing facilities at the base include a 410-foot wharf and a 278-foot wharf. While they're insufficient to support most of the U.S. Navy's surface combatants, they can accommodate U.S. Coast Guard vessels, such as *Sentinel*-class cutters based out of Naval Base Guam. Larger ships can anchor in Lombrum Bay, a natural harbor.

The U.S. similarly funded an expansion of Ream Naval Base in Cambodia back in 2019. However, a secret pact signed between Beijing and Phnom Penh resulted in a Chinese takeover of the base. U.S. funded facilities were subsequently razed to the ground. At the time, the takeover seemed like a significant setback for Washington's attempts to counter Chinese influence in the region.

Since then, the U.S. has been spreading out forces and stocks from a number of major bases in the Pacific.

The U.S. started funding infrastructure modernization and expansion efforts across the Pacific under the Pentagon's Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) including aircraft parking aprons at Base Air Base in the Philippines and Darwin Air Base in Australia; naval Port expansions at Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands; Yap in Micronesia; and Koror in Palau.

In its current form, the base is well situated to support joint law enforcement patrols to counter Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing that has plagued the region, though it would need more investments to host many of Australia and America's naval vessels.

Zach Abdi

Zach Abdi is a freelance defense writer and analyst based in

Helsinki, Finland. He is interested in U.S. military modernization.

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Best Newest Oldest

TMark
2 years ago

Article: *"The combined expected price tag for these projects ranges from $11 million to $25 million."*

BAM !!! Once again our accountants nailed it. Right down to the penny.

7 0 Reply

View'de → TMark
2 years ago edited

In the end, the decimal point will be shifted to the RIGHT more than once.

4 0 Reply

beyondnegrodome — View'de

2 years ago

The Australians should footing the bill for the construction.

0 0 Reply

tiger — TMark

2 years ago

11 to 25 million to build a wharf? How about if we had 11 to 25 million to build some Dolphins to protect a bridge in Baltimore?

0 0 Reply

Secundius — tiger

2 years ago

Probably going to cost a lot more than that! The Sunshine Skyway Bridge in Tampa Bay measures ~370-meters in length with a Dolphin protective structure measuring ~400-meters in length! In 2023 USD the estimated cost was ~ $94-Million USD! The Baltimore Francis Key Bridge is more than six times the length of the Sunshine Skyline Bridge expansion! Dolphin protective structure for the Francis Key Bridge expansion would probably be in excess of ~ $707-Million USD...

0 0 Reply

G

Graeme Rymill

2 years ago edited

"Larger ships can anchor in Lombrum Bay, a natural harbor."

And just a few miles west of Lombrum Bay, across from Manus Island, is Seeadler Harbor. "Seeadler Harbor, one of the largest and best in the Southwest Pacific, lies within the ellipse formed by Manus, the curving shore of adjoining Los Negros, and the reef-

bound islands to the north. Its protected waters are capable of accommodating a large fleet of capital ships."

In WWII Seeadler Harbor was "a major site of repair and logistic support for ships participating in the Philippine invasion and those operating in the South Pacific area. There were at all times a large number of ships in the harbor, this number varying from approximately 200 to approximately 600."

Infamously USS Mount Hood, an ammunition ship, exploded while berthed in Seeadler Harbor on 10 November 1944. "Moments later, a massive blast of the 3,800 tons of ordnance aboard obliterated the ship and killed every one of her over 300-man crew who were aboard. The explosion dug a crater on the bottom, 35 feet below, 1,000 feet long, 50 feet across, and 30–40 feet deep. The largest piece of the ship found was 16 by 10 feet. No human remains were recovered."

6 0 Reply

B **Bob Sullivan**

Graeme Rymill

2 years ago

I'm glad someone brought up the W.W.11 history associated with this area. Historic battles were fought here.

1 0 Reply

Jon doe

2 years ago

Make sure the US employs PNG locals,great people, remember the Fuzzy Wuzzies from ww2

4 0 Reply

tiger

2 years ago

We have 11 to 25 million to build a wharf Halfway Around the World? But I've got schools that have had asbestos that's been sitting there for 60 years in Philadelphia... glad we have our priorities straight.

1 0 Reply

C

Claud → tiger

2 years ago

Glad your finally realizing that we also need to turn our focus outward too as well as taking care of domestic issues.

1 0 Reply

tiger → Claud

2 years ago

Turn our Focus outward? What do you think we've been doing since the Marshall Plan?

0 0 Reply

S

Sailor68

2 years ago

Good place to provide support to the Philippines, Guam etc

1 0 Reply

View'de

2 years ago edited

This part of the world produced many war graves 80 years ago.
Perhaps one of your ancestors, as mine.

1 0 Reply

YCPlum → View'de

2 years ago

Ironically, a strong military helps to deter war. Of course, teh diplomats have to do their part.

0 0 Reply

CAPT ALOHA

2 years ago

Papua New Guinea --- WOW --- GREAT LIBERTY port, I am certain ...

Wish I was still "in" just so I could go on "Libs" there ...

0 0 Reply

E

Espania1958

2 years ago

Wonder who you have to piss off to get stationed there?

0 0 Reply

S

Sailor68 → Espania1958

2 years ago edited

With exception of one step snakes and other vermin that could kill you. It would be a great place. Beautiful native women, song and the locally produced wine. Which is said to be quite good. Of course there are fathers and husbands of those women

0 0 Reply

RM

Rusty Mitt → Sailor68

2 years ago

For some insight into Papua New Guinea and its troubles, I recommend the wonderful film “Mr. Pip”.

2 0 Reply

Secundius

2 years ago

The former Imperial Japanese island of Yap in the Caroline Island group north of Guam is also being upgraded for the USAF for ~ $400-Million USD, with construction to begin in August 2025…

0 0 Reply

Old Coasty → Secundius

2 years ago

Yap is Southwest of Guam. The Caroline Island group spreads from Southwest along the South to Southeast of Guam and the Northern Marianas.

https://upload.wikimedia.or...

Palau is just off of the map to the West.

In the Northern Marianas, North of Guam, is Tinian where the Atomic Bombs were flown

Tinian where the Atomic Bombs were flown from. The USAF is clearing and refurbishing a small portion of that old base.

It has the same problem that Guam has. Missiles from China, as well as the illegal manmade Islets in the West Philipine Sea (South China Sea). It also is closer to China!

0 0 Reply

BR **Bill Richardson**

2 years ago

Look at the condition of the shacks behind the two operators. This is a very minor us military infastructure project. Why is this news?

0 0 Reply

tiger → Bill Richardson

2 years ago

It is 11 or 25 million not being spent here at home. I could think of a few schools here that need to get rid of asbestos. Maybe we could repair the 100-year-old water mains here? I could think of some bridges that need ? I-95 is closed yet again. But, we are going to spend 11 or 25 million to fix a wharf on the other side of the planet.

0 0 Reply

C **corsair**

2 years ago

About time some resources are put into the region, especially after the fiasco of bumbling the issues of Solomon's and Australia's seemingly weak willed efforts to deal with the encroaching threat in its front yard.

0 0 Reply

B **Brandon Elias**

2 years ago

Pretty obvoius what the Trump Administration saw. A Military Base in Lorengau would not be of any use to the majority of Papua New Guineans. Infrastructure projects would be a better alternative, much like the Chinese are doing. Just my thought

Chinese are doing. Just my thought...

0 0 Reply

RM **Rusty Mitt** Brandon Elias

2 years ago

Pence announced the initiative to develop Lombrum Naval base in late 2018, but the U.S. did not allocate any funds towards the redevelopment effort. But the Trump administration illegally diverted billions of Military Construction funds from 2019 and 2020 revenue streams to border wall construction.

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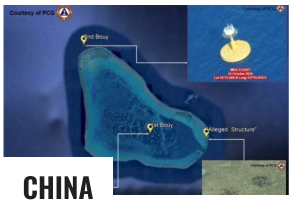

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